WA from Harvard Sq. to Washington St. Elevated from Winter St to Northampton.

6-25-56

SUBJECT: Field Trip from Boston City Hospital to Old North Church, by foot, Monday, 25 June

NOTE: comments in parentheses are not part of the verbatim transcription of the field notes.

Points are described by the clock system. 12:00 dead ahead, 6:00 direct rear, etc. Angles refer to points above eye level and at the furthest linear point.

Weather was hot and sunny.

No pre-trip reference to map.

--- SIGHTING ---

Started down Harrison Street towards elevated structure on Washington St. This was partly visible through a screen of trees. (see A)

Entire length of street at about 7 feet height no parking signs, perspective like points (receding from one end of the block to the other)

Apartment for rent signs all along street

Funeral sign black against blue awnings

About 30' from Corner of Mass Ave and Harrison note central strip of sheen on other side of elevated structure along Harrison.

Turning corner struck with Puritan Theatre sign at 2:00 (corner not burned actually still off Harrison Street). (C)

Eye follows elevated structure up Washington Street clump of trees seen at 1:00 at about 100', at 12:00 a large brown facade is visible as a dominant point above the elevated structure (farthest visible linear point)

(on somes street corner between Harrison and Worcester Sq.) White Tower Hamburg Restaurant, stands out white brick among all the reds and brown. Previous (mentioned) brick facade at distant becoming a series of three brick facades, brick walls, that is.

--- INCIDENT ---
Corner of Worcester Square. Studebaker 27Hp billboard, very bold graphic presentation. To the left square looks intriguing. Decide to walk up one side and down the other.

Boston City Hospital at one end, end facing Washington Street strongly developed architecturally.

A small used as standing lot (parking) for a number of taxis. Square seems to leak out the space that is at this end. Triple parking on one side. Shade trees along park strip rather good. Elderly people and pregnant women, home painting job of brownstone boshed by cheap paint. Square itself not outstanding but a good enough relief, looks inviting from Washington St end. Other end horrible, not architectural, seems capricious, truncated.

Fan shaped clump of trees running in an arc from 12:00 to 2:00 behind gas station about 200' ft from point of observation. Notice most of my attention is captured by right hand side of the block facing towards North St. Realize elevated is present but do not feel it impinging on sight.

About 30' from corner notice trees are behind grey stone wall - about 6' - tall, space inside not readily - 30' feet is about right in judging, inscribed in wall notice sign 'fire plug 26'. Turn around see fire plug.

Middle of the block is broken by iron fence and gate, space is some kind of graveyard, a few headstones and what seems like vaults of a sort, rather curious arrangement of trees and structures, well manicured lawns, though shaggy at edges and at the bases of the vaults, buildings in back have no clue as to use.

Towards corner is sign, The Franklin Square House.

Old man stops me, without introduction says I worked over there, painting across the street, in 1911. Asked him if notices any change in area. Looks at me, "Change?", "Yes". He: "Yes, much change." Walks on.

View of John Hancock Bldg. visible at the framed by trestle and limbs of tree (about 10,000 yds)
About 250' from corner can see Blockstone Square to my left. Through the trees can see John Hancock Bldg at about 10,000 yards etc.

At corner realize square at my right too, not noticed at previous observation point. Scallop fountain in center of right square, in an arc 300' feet beyond is yellow brick houng project.

halfway past the square notice twin scalloped fountain to my left (in square to the left)

at 10:00 is point of visual interest, greek temple facade (Roman ?) Neither square intriguing me as did Worcester Sq. (perhaps because I can “read” these two spaces quickly, the sense of adventure is not there, Worcester Sq sort of leads one on, though there is a disappointmment at the end.)

at about 500' (liss) elevated seems to be turning previously described brick facades are now rather distinct, fenestration visible, they completely lose there attraction, except as reference point once noticed and now being approached.

sense of closure apparent at 1:00 and along roof lines at 45°

attractive red-head, early-thirties talking to old man sitting on steps of apartment house, brings to mind what Mencken said about red-headed widows.

Facing Post Office Station A, Cathedral and square begin to appear as edge of view at 12:00

New crossing Mer. Reynolds Way. Keep out sign sticks out of landscaped square. Cathedral (H) massive holds interest, texture and color like Cubist paintings of early twenties; yellow, orange-brown and grey. elevated takes definite swerve to the left
space in intersection of streets North side of Cathedral rather broken up in comparison to other street corners along the way.

Hills and structures on them can be seen to the right about 2 miles away.

Landscaping is rather clumpish.

elevated taken definite course towards the left previously line of closure dead ahead was about 2000 ft at minimum, now maximum is 5000 as elevated and building heights merge to form a visual wall

Facade of Boston Penny Savings Bank discolored elevated swings sharply to the left at point of enclosure about 600' four story graystone buildings sharply etched against red and brown facades

Begin to feel an enclosure not previously discerned are streets getting narrower or buildings taller? (both I believe)

the Old Oak Tavern, an oddity, relic of the 90's mahogany and brass, brass rail along windows at hip height

Swamp of the elevated is to the left 500' dead ahead little sense of what is going on answer to be just about parallel to one side of the John Hancock building now visible over trellis and roof tops, area getting dirtier, noisier more enclosed overhead.

been noticing a lot of X-Ray (TB) signs, rate of incidence high here

the syndrome is shaping: used clothing stores, used furniture, barber schools, vending machine establishment, empty stores, palm reading, marginal stores, dirty windows, dirt, smell of urine.
hoek shops on both corners, another barber school, still the sense of a visual wall about 500' at D
12:00. little relief from what is similar to mounting tension

the Red Fox Cafe, intriguing cafe, firing no hint as what is inside, little noise coming out as compared to other bars on both sides of the street that are blaring away

to the right Laconia takes a surprising twist, some trees on one side, blighted but facade is interesting, rock line has some variety, probably caught my attention because of the change in street direction throwing the facade into view at an odd angle.

the nadir, a nether region, all enclosed overhead the sun is shut out, a variety of stores, neon signs in daytime, smells varied, sidewalks all marked with spittle, vomit, minuscule cigarette butts, tension evident, about fifty feet from corner must cross-over as buildings to the right are being torn down

open spaces as buildings are under demolition, at distance three strong buildings stand out at about 2000 yds, 100 yds, 1000 feet, people watching work

store front plans reading and other services?

Grace and Hope Mission (a backward glance as I felt someone was watching, they were)

between Cobb and Castle people at the Wells Home (indigent men) have bunches along walls watching construction, in congruity in middle of block, while buildings going down on one side of the street, on the other a new faced going in on a busy and noisy bar. Railroad tracks on either side of Castle. John Hancock Blvd strong to the left. Cross on unusual iron lacework structure at 1000' feet 12:00, 45°

Greek store signs at one o'clock
To the left 50' feet from corner blue and white sign Washington Street visually closed 800' feet at 12:00, moves to the left. White office building edges lettered the left go corner. To my right, 3:00, elevated begins to go underground.

At 3:00 undulating space, a relief from angle openings previously experience walking down most of Washington Street. Shark Hotel facade forms visual barrier at 3:00.

From corner Cambridge engraving company signs bend around and follow just below the 5th story line for the entire length of the building.

Parking lot forms a crescent space from 9-12:00 background for street facade with interesting stucco fenestration, buildings lines vary in pitch of roof stage hanging effect?

American Theatre sign pops out at edge of closure about 800' ahead.

Common Street to the left forms another relief from the at line street facade usually experienced at street corners; shaped thus in plan.

Entering furniture wholesale/retail district, a mass of conflicting signs, visual tension, chaos, not an easily read area (visually).

Aptly chosen and decorative furniture designs in windows

Sun’s rays on instruments in Hollis music shop make an interesting pattern of light and shadow, strong contrast between the utilitarian neatness and strength of the instruments and the garish floss that decorates the furniture windows on either side.

Clock at 9:00 marks furniture store, grotesque but it stands out, so might be successful that way.

Movie house area, neon signs, bars, smell of stale beer and food quite pronounced, a seemingly accelerated pace becomes apparent as one crosses Stuart street.
striking hardware store sign 50' from corner at 11:00, composed of pieces of hardware, oversized, silver on bakch background

again the sense of quickening of movement or activity, smells and sounds begin to impinge on the visual senses, a more different types of stores and people sort of confuse the area in the two blocks, difficult to categorize it as being one thing or another land use wise

at Boylston decide to cross over to other side of the street, movie signs quite pronounced especially the Paramount

have feeling of solid block of movie facades perhaps because even the shoe stores have a movie-house front, i.e., neon signs, flashy displays

at 3:00 just opposite the Paramount teeming down passageway, overhead, in small alley much noise and dirt

notice the edge of the Common on the right 9:00 at 300', can't see floor of Tremont Street, would be difficult to estimate how wide street is, and except for the hard edge of an office building it would be difficult to define where Bedford ends and the Common begins

30' from corner the scene changes, less garishness strong vertical feeling, vista ahead opened to about 1000' no strong sense of closure

vertical signs changing to flags which are rectangular shape, at the same time a sense of broadening is felt though the street width itself does not appear to become wider

landscaping around Filenes at 30' level is fuzzy though visually pronounce does not seem bold enough the Common view at 9:00 is not as strong architecturally as an edge as it is at Bedford

Overhead cover around Filenes again seems to be weak though it covers the entire sidewalk decide to cross over to other side of street
In front of I. J. Fox's - 300' at 1:00 Old South Church just out from building and street lines quite strong and dominant linear limits though are rather confusing as this places a strain on the feeling of a flow down and past the structure "haymow quite decorative with many flags hanging from the 2nd story line"
at Milk street the vista ahead becomes closed again, to the right a sort of confusion, no one point snags at first glance, Old South Building with its grey sculptured facade rather ornate
narrow crescent bending around Boston Globe Bldge Washington Street takes pronounced swing to the left many people in front of Globe Bldge, reading headlines

Yellow brick office bldg. stands out a 1:00 (Bates & Co.)
grey bldgs at head of street form one end of that linear canyon down over to other side of street again attaased to (opposite) Radio Shack

at Brattle Street space opens, swells into ellipse, Panthea Hall to the right

subway station rather dead area, un-busy, now a sense of a narrowing space as Washington St closes in again

bookstores, wholesale houses, dull, grey, but with a lot of interesting things, a row of empty store windows, truck laying a smoke screen from its exhaust pipe

entering out into Union and Washington St oval

difficult area to cross, proceeding under highway, Bus terminal for Lynn-Salem buses at 9:00

D'Agostino Bros. stand 150' ahead, windy and dusty under the highway

short turn towards Salem St. M. End Meat Mkt of corner, uphill a vast cacophony of sounds, smells, and colors, one doesn't feel like stopping and writing observations, feeling of hostility (?)

top of the hill after it turns a little to the left Old North Church, in front of church, at 12:00
facing with Church at Back is another quite looking street
with brick walls, Hull St.

one can’t walk up Salem without sensing a pulsating
dynamic neighborhood, life in a sardine can,
two of the famed North End blonde Italians, female,
raucous voices, blooming figures, yet with lots of
smile and romance in their gestures as they argue,
Anna Wagner vitality, Castalace in front of the store,
the stores in front of the curbs, the people everywhere,
all ages and sexes, the Old Irish cop berating two young
girls for cursing, the plump Italian storekeeper upholding
the policeman for doing so.... noise, color, texture